Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
Affaires autochtones et Développement du Nord Canada

Strategic Research
La recherche stratégique

The Community Well-Being Index

SUMMARY OF TRENDS IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES, 1981-2011

Key Findings:

- Average Community Well-Being (CWB) scores for First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities increased slowly but steadily between 1981 and 2011.
- In 2011, the CWB gap between First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities was substantial and the same size as it was in 1981.
- First Nations communities in the Prairie Provinces have the lowest average CWB scores, while First Nations communities in the Yukon have the highest.
- Most of the lowest-scoring communities in Canada are First Nations but there is a number that score at or above the national average.

Introduction

The Community Well-Being (CWB) index is a method of measuring well-being at the community level. It combines data on income, education, housing, and labour force activity into well-being "scores" for most communities in Canada. Scores can range from a low of zero to a high of 100.

Since 2004, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has used the Community Well-Being index to track socioeconomic conditions in First Nations, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal communities. This research brief reviews trends in First Nations and non-Aboriginal community well-being over the 30-year period between 1981 and 2011.

Main Findings

National CWB trends

Average CWB scores for First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities increased slowly but steadily between 1981 and 2011 (Figure 1). The CWB gap between First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities is substantial. In 2011, the average CWB score for First Nations communities was 20 points lower than the average score for non-Aboriginal communities. This gap is the same size as it was in 1981.

During the 1990s, First Nations communities improved slightly faster than non-Aboriginal communities and the gap narrowed. Those reductions in the gap were largely undone when non-Aboriginal communities improved more than First Nations communities did between 2001 and 2006.

The widening of the CWB gap that occurred between 2001 and 2006 was partially driven by a jump in non-Aboriginal communities' high school completion rates. This jump should be interpreted with caution: the education questions on the census were changed in 2006, reducing the comparability of 2006 education data with data from previous censuses. Nevertheless, the narrowing of the gap that occurred during the 1990s did not resume after 2006. Between 2006 and 2011, First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities improved at similar rates and the CWB gap was relatively stable.

The CWB Components

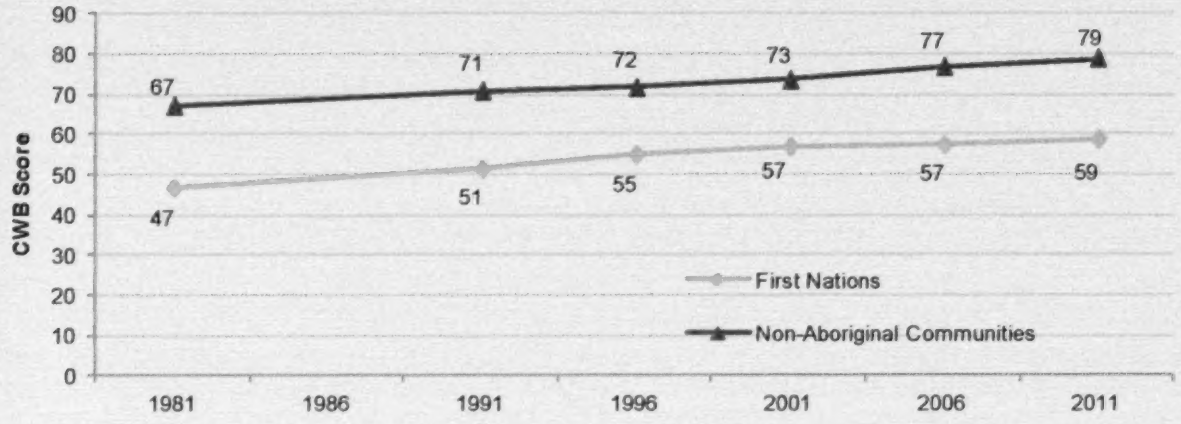
As noted above, the CWB is made up of four components: income, education, housing, and labour force activity. Each can range from a low of zero to a high of 100. From largest to smallest, the component gaps between First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities were as follows in 2011: income (25 points), housing (23 points), education (17 points), and labour force activity (16 points).

Each CWB component has undergone different changes over time:

1. Income: The average income score for First Nations communities increased considerably (16 points) between

Canada

Figure 1: Average CWB scores, First Nation, and non-Aboriginal communities, 1981–2011

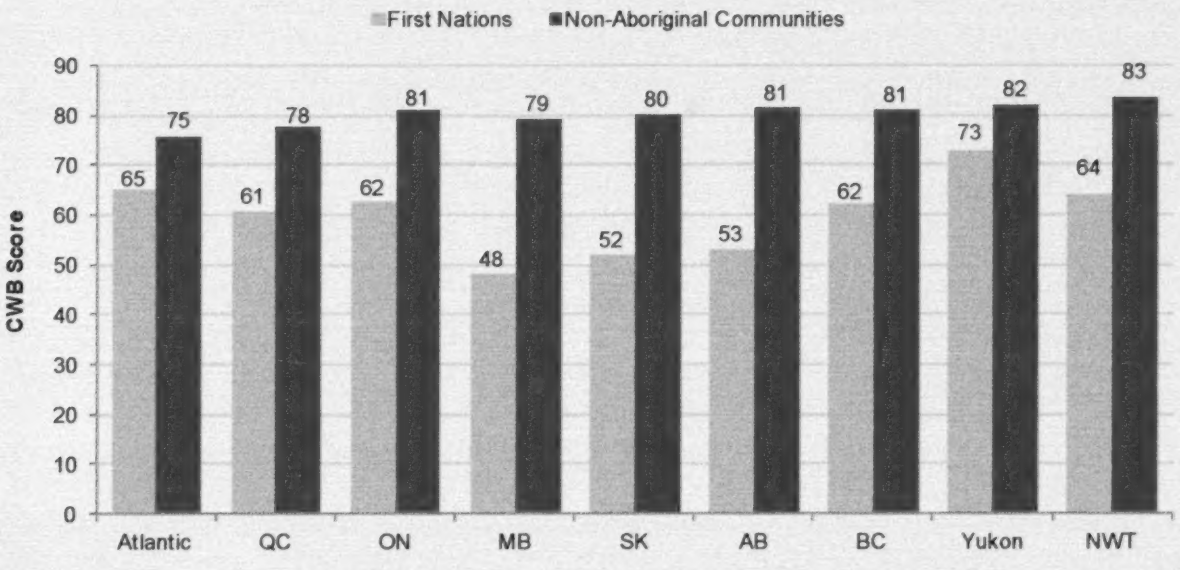


Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1981-2006 and National Household Survey, 2011.

1981 and 2011. However, because the average income score for non-Aboriginal communities increased at a similar rate (15 points), the income gap was virtually unchanged.

2. Education: The average education score for First Nations communities also increased considerably between 1981 and 2011 (22 points). This increase was driven by greater high school completion rates. Increases in university completion were smaller. The education gap between First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities narrowed slowly until 2001 - about one point every five years. It widened between 2001 and 2006 as a result of a large jump in high school completion in non-Aboriginal communities. As mentioned above, this jump should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, the narrowing of the education gap that was observed until 2001 did not resume after 2006. In fact, between 2006 and 2011, the average education score for non-Aboriginal communities increased more than the average score for First Nations communities. The education gap widened slightly as a result.
3. Housing: The average housing score for non-Aboriginal communities has been consistently high since 1981, reflecting generally strong housing conditions across the country. The average housing score for First

Figure 2: Average CWB Scores by Region, First Nation, and non-Aboriginal Communities, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

Nations communities improved modestly in the 1980s and 1990s but has shown little movement since 2001. Over the thirty year period between 1981 and 2011, the housing gap between First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities narrowed by a modest five points. Until 2006, housing quantity (i.e., crowding) improved, while housing quality (i.e., state of repair) declined. Between 2006 and 2011, quantity remained stable after 25-years of gradual improvement. Quality, however, showed signs of rebounding.

4. Labour Force Activity: First Nations communities' average labour force activity score increased a few points during the 1990s and early 2000s but these gains were largely lost between 2006 and 2011. First Nations' average labour force activity score was only one point higher in 2011 than it was in 1981 and the gap relative to non-Aboriginal communities widened slightly. Between 1981 and 1991, First Nations' average labour force participation score increased, while employment decreased. Although the employment score improved steadily between 1991 and 2006, it still had not returned to its 1981 level by 2011. In contrast, although the labour force participation score did not increase after 1996, it was still ten points higher in 2011 than it was in 1981.

Regional variations in CWB scores

First Nations' average CWB scores vary across regions (Figure 2). First Nations communities in the Yukon have the highest average CWB score. Although the Prairie Provinces continue to have the lowest average scores, First Nations in Alberta and Saskatchewan improved more than First Nations in other regions did between 2006 and 2011.

Variations between individual communities

Average CWB scores provide only a partial picture of well-being in First Nations. CWB scores also vary considerably among individual First Nations communities. Although 98 of the 100 lowest-scoring communities are First Nations, many First Nations communities score at or above the Canadian average. Two of the 100 top-scoring communities are First Nations.

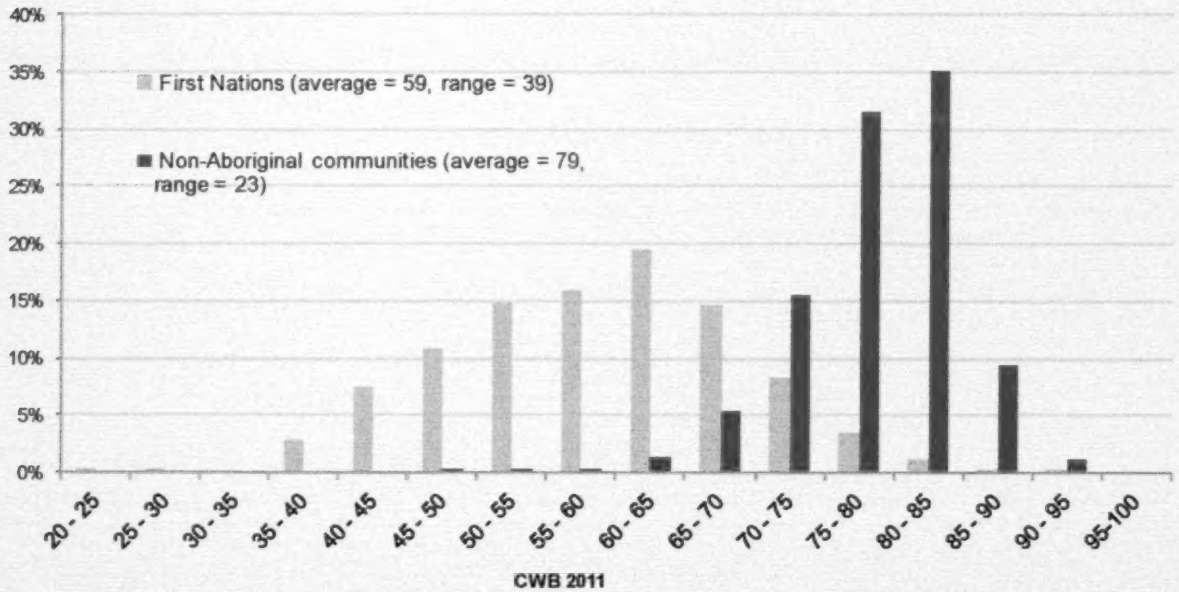
CWB scores vary more among First Nations than they do among non-Aboriginal communities (Figure 3). In 2011, 95% of non-Aboriginal communities' CWB scores fell in the 23-point range between 66 and 89, while 95% of First Nation communities' scores fell in the 39-point range between 39 and 78.

Conclusion

As measured by the CWB, well-being in First Nations communities continues to improve. Unless the pace of improvement in First Nations communities begins to outstrip that of non-Aboriginal communities consistently, well-being gaps will persist.

The variability of CWB scores – both between regions and among individual communities - reinforces the importance of regional and community-specific approaches to policy and program development.

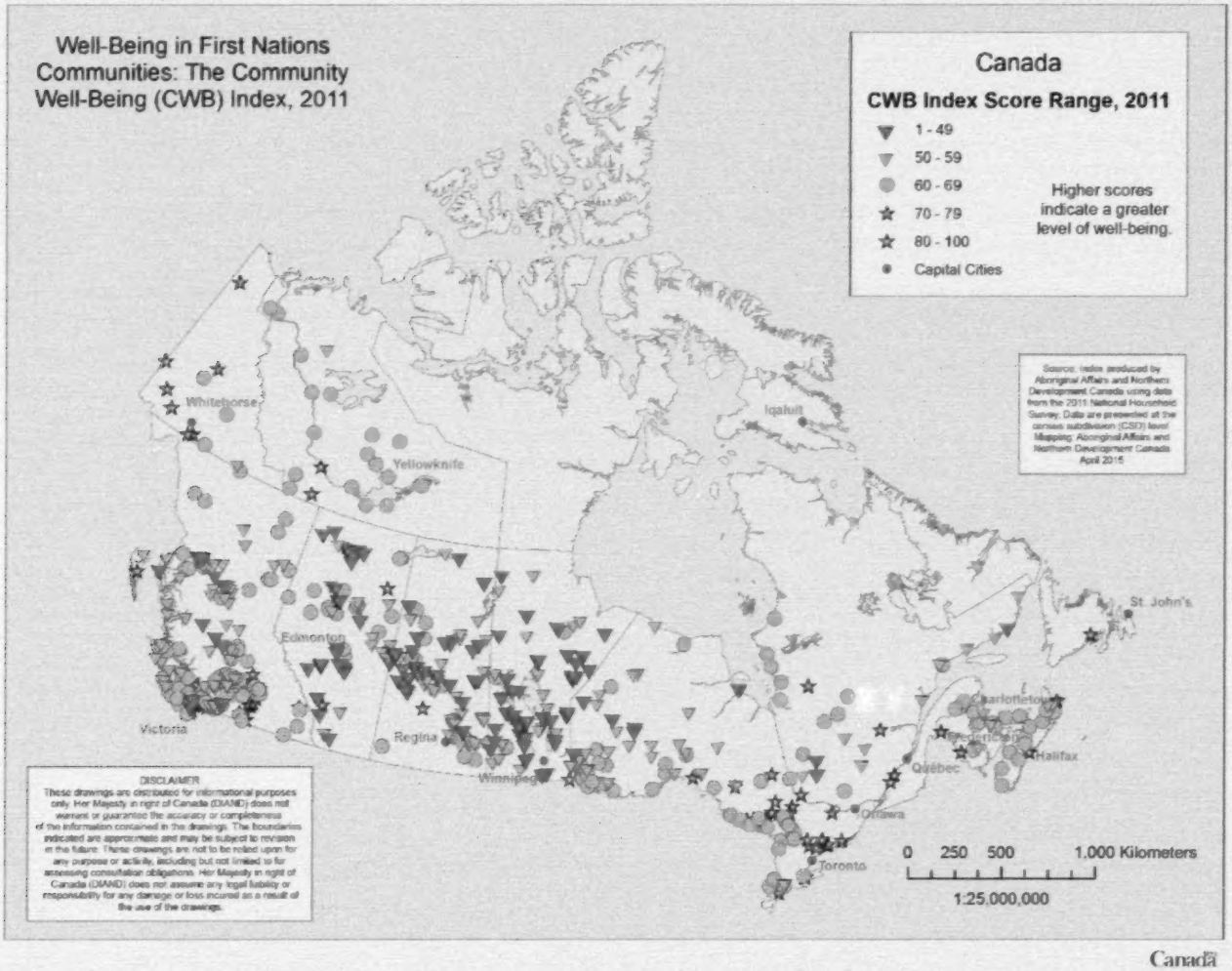
Figure 3: CWB Distributions, First Nation, and non-Aboriginal communities, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

Methodological Details

CWB scores were calculated using data from the long form of the Census of Canada (1981–2006) and the National Household Survey (2011). The CWB emphasizes socio-economic aspects of well-being. Owing primarily to data limitations, the CWB does not include other elements of well-being such as health, culture, and the environment. CWB scores are available for most communities in Canada, which were classified as either First Nations communities, Inuit communities, or non-Aboriginal communities. Communities are defined in terms of census subdivisions, which comprise municipalities and areas equivalent to municipalities, such as Indian reserves. Some First Nations are associated with more than one census subdivision (i.e., some First Nations include more than one First Nations community). Some non-Aboriginal communities have substantial Aboriginal populations and some First Nations and Inuit communities have substantial non-Aboriginal populations. All community residents are included in the calculation of a CWB score.


Well-Being in First Nations Communities: The Community Well-Being (CWB) Index, 2011
Canada
CWB Index Score Range, 2011
1 - 49
50 - 59
60 - 69
70 - 79
80 - 100
Capital Cities
Higher scores indicate a greater level of well-being.
Source: Index produced by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada using data from the 2011 National Household Survey. Data are presented at the census subdivision (CSD) level. Mapping: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada April 2015
Whitehorse
Yellowknife
Iqaluit
Edmonton
Victoria
Regina
Winnipeg
Ottawa
Toronto
Québec
Fredericton
Charlottetown
Halifax
St. John's
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